Activity

This activity is a hybrid of Bill Reilly’s *The Global Coalition* and ePal’s own *The Way We Are*. Different elements were incorporated from each idea as a way of keeping the activity based in Delaware’s Social Studies standards, while still maintaining long-term student engagement. This activity correlates well with many of the state Social Standards that are tested in 7th grade, including Geography 1a, Geography 2a, Geography 3a, and Economics 4a. History 2 could also be included as a possible extension of this lesson, particularly if students need to conduct research on any historical phenomena they learn of throughout the course of their communication exchange. Furthermore, many of the important 21st century skills that students need to succeed will be honed throughout the duration of this activity, including communication and collaboration, digital citizenship, and technology operations and concepts.

The activity is expected to take the entire school year, with different activities based on the particular unit being covered in Social Studies class at that time. For example, when we are engaged in our “Green Cities” unit, students will be able to relate the content to the impact of the natural environment on “the face of a place”; during our “Conflict & Cooperation” unit, students will delve into a deeper (and more personal) understanding of how geography dictates (or does not dictate) decisions that are made by a society.

Anticipated Outcomes

When beginning the activity, I am sure many of the students will have a preference on which country their ePal resides. I am unsure of whether or not I will accommodate their requests. I feel that in order to attain the full benefit of this activity, students need to be exposed to as many different cultures as possible – particularly those they may not be familiar or comfortable with. Collectively, I ideally would like students throughout my classes to be exposed to as many cultures as possible, which is why will attempt to adopt Bill Reilly’s suggestion of forming communication groups for various ePals, instead of a one-to-one student-to-ePal ratio. In groups, students will have access to many more ePals than they would individually, thereby increasing exposure and raising the probability of making meaningful connections to the content.

I have six stated learning outcomes with regard to this activity: exchange ideas and thoughts in a global forum; use maps to explore and analyze places; publish what reflects themselves, their cultures and their communities; recognize and share specific examples of what it means to be from a different culture; build a relationship with a student in another region of the world; and become global citizens who are empowered to act as a collaborative global community to have a constructive impact on their shared planet. Aside from these outcomes, students will be better prepared for the instructional units that do not directly correlate with this activity. For example, the “Project Citizen” unit focuses on the role and duty of a responsible citizen. As students learn what it means to be a good digital citizen, they will be better prepared to understand their civic roles and duties.

Topic of Unit/Lesson

At the conclusion of this year-long lesson (Project 1ETC – One Earth, One Thought, One Community), students will be able to:

1. Exchange ideas and thoughts in a global forum.
2. Use maps to explore and analyze places.
3. Publish what reflects themselves, their cultures and their communities.
4. Recognize and share specific examples of what it means to be from a different culture.
5. Build a relationship with a student in another region of the world.
6. Become global citizens who are empowered to act as a collaborative global community to have a constructive impact on their shared planet.

Student Profile

My projected average class size for next year is 34 students. Roughly 45% of our school’s students are Caucasian, 40% are African-American, and 15% are Hispanic. Our school has a free-and-reduced meal rate of approximately 73%. Given these data, much of the activity will be completed during school, as less than a majority of our students have access to the Internet at home. Furthermore, given the large projected class size, it will difficult to ensure a one-to-one student-to-computer ratio without supplementing access with additional netbook carts (three instead of the usual two, if used in the classroom; one, if computers are accessed in the computer labs).

Type of Computer-based Instruction & Differentiated Strategies

Much of the technology used will be simple – computers with an Internet browser. Initially, some instruction will be needed for epals.com and weebly.com. For this, I may select a handful of students with good peer relationships and a prowess for technology and train them on the two websites. They will then be responsible for instructing small groups of students on how to use the two websites for the purposes of this activity.

State Standards

Geography 1, 6-8a

Students will demonstrate mental maps of the world and its sub-regions which include the relative location and characteristics of major physical features, political divisions, and human settlements.

Geography 2, 6-8a

Students will apply a knowledge of the major processes shaping natural environments to understand how different peoples have changed and been affected by, physical environments in the world's sub-regions.

Geography 3, 6-8a

Students will identify and explain the major cultural patterns of human activity in the world's sub-regions.

Economics 4, 6-8a

Students will examine how nations with different economic systems specialize and become interdependent through trade and how government policies allow either free or restricted trade.

National Educational Technology 2

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.

National Educational Technology 5

Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.

National Educational Technology 6

Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations.

Identify the Assessment Strategies

*Self-Assessments*

In all likelihood, students will need assistance with some form of technology or software throughout this project. As a result, students will be assessing themselves periodically on their familiarity with the technology and software we will use throughout this lesson.

*Pre-Assessments (Diagnostic/Formative)*

Students will be given informal diagnostic and formative assessments throughout duration of this lesson in order for the teacher to determine what content-related benchmarks need to be clarified and expanded on, specifically as they relate to the information received by students from their ePal.

*Post-Assessments (Formative/Summative)*

The collaborative website will serve as the major formative and summative assessment for this lesson. Throughout the related units in the school year (“Why Trade?”, “Conflict & Cooperation”, “Green Cities”, and “Expanding Freedoms”) students will be given periodic formative assessments and the common standardized summative assessment.

Summary of the Topic/Main Idea/Essential Questions

1. What makes me who I am? (G2a, G3a, E4a)
2. How does a person’s environment impact what he or she does and experiences? (G2a)
3. How is a person’s culture impacted by where he or she lives? (G2a, G3a)

Identify the Instructional Strategies

*Communication*

One key element of Project 1ETC is the exchange of ideas on a broad range of topics through various forms of communication. Throughout the school year, our curriculum will cover global interdependence through trade, conflict and cooperation between groups of people, basic human and democratic rights, and the environment’s impact on human cultures. Through our international network, Project 1ETC will help students to identify and respect other viewpoints on these topics and understand why they may differ from their own. Through the global art exchange that Project 1ETC will help organize, students will help build a collection of artwork from children in various countries around the world that will be displayed throughout the school and then auctioned at the end of the school year.

*Publication*

Another key element is the Project 1ETC website (<http://project1etc.weebly.com/>). Much of the communication that we receive will be posted here, as well as our reflections, summaries, learning logs, and other pertinent information that will help to advance the stated learning outcomes.

*Action*

With the funds resulting from the auction of the international artwork, students will select and champion a borrower (or borrowers) from Kiva.org to lend the money raised from the international art auction. Students will select their desired borrower and advocate for their borrower during a two-week campaign at the conclusion of the school year.

Reflection

I am looking forward to implementing this lesson at the start of the next school year. The other grade-level members of my department have expressed an interest in being part of the project, as well. We have already begun brainstorming the possible curricular links that could and should be made so that this activity meshes smoothly with the curriculum in place and feels like a natural extension of it.

As I did the research for this lesson, I based many of my design components off Bill Reilly’s “The Global Coalition” project. While the curriculum of New York is obviously different, there are still many similarities that make this lesson appealing for Delaware-based Social Studies teachers.

I was inspired by the work and effort the students of Mr. Reilly invested in their version of the project. The activity appears to be very engaging for learners, both with regard to the 21st century technology skills and the state-mandated Social Studies standards.

Resources

In terms of technology, I will need access to Internet-accessible computers on a regular basis in order for the students to maintain communication with their ePals and contribute to the lesson’s culminating website. This access will be in the form of portable netbook carts and scheduled time at the various computer labs in the building. Students will also be encouraged (but not required) to communicate with their ePal outside of the confines of the school building.

References

Bill Reilly, USA, Project Description and Video - ePals Global Community. (n.d.). *ePals Global Community*. Retrieved March 19, 2012, from <http://www.epals.com/media/p/234769.aspx>

Reilly, B. (n.d.). THE GLOBAL COALITION. *Bethlehem Central School District - Delmar, NY*. Retrieved March 18, 2012, from <http://bcsd.k12.ny.us/middle/Global/global.htm>

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